Prevention Strategies

It is the responsibility of every citizen to protect our drinking water supplies.

- Test individual wells every year for coliform bacteria.
- Dispose of hazardous materials such as oil, gasoline, and pesticides at a licensed facility to help protect all rivers, streams, lakes, etc. In Clark County, Columbia Resource Company accepts hazardous household materials free of charge.
- By law, abandoned wells must be decommissioned by a licensed well driller.

For more information please contact:

- Southwest Washington Health District, Environmental Health
  360-397-8428
- EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline
  1-800-426-4791
- Columbia Resource Company
  Central Transfer (360) 256-8482
  West Vancouver MRC (360) 737-1727

Sources:
SWWHD, Reviewing the Health of Clark County, 1998 Update, 1998.

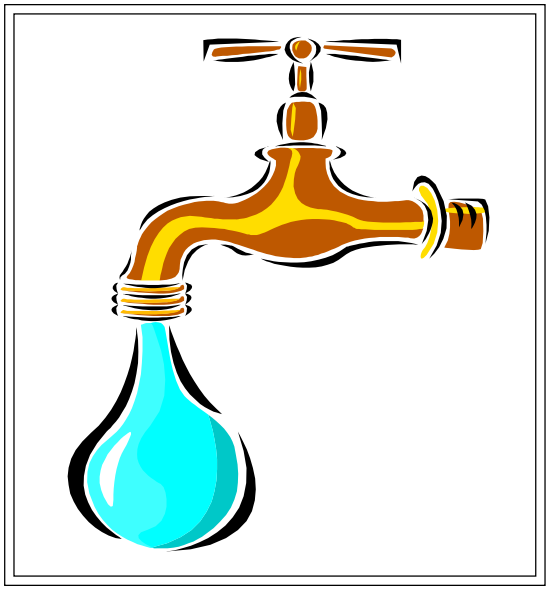
For further information please contact
Clark County Health Department
Assessment and Research
(360) 397-8215
Publication No. 99 AR009

Assessment and Research Unit
Clark County Health Department
P. O. Box 9825
Vancouver, Washington 98666-8825

Southwest Washington Health District

Drinking Water

in Clark County

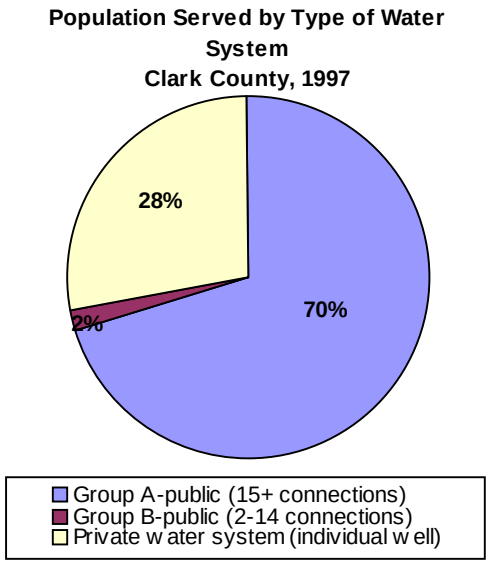


Drinking water is vital for our survival. For this reason we focus our efforts on protecting all major drinking water sources such as, freshwater streams, public drinking water sources and private wells. Our efforts are designed to prevent potential health problems and injury from drinking water sources.

Water Systems

Residents of Clark County obtain drinking water through public or private water systems.

- Private water systems (i.e., individual wells) supply drinking water to 28% of Clark County residents which is about 30,000 systems servicing 90,000 people.
- The majority of residents (70%) are served by large public Group A water systems which include the large municipal systems.
- Most drinking water in Clark County comes from wells.



Drinking Water Quality

Drinking water may contain at least small amounts of some contaminants. The presence of certain contaminants such as iron and manganese usually do not present health risks for most people. However, even small amounts of contaminants such as *Cryptosporidium* may be dangerous for vulnerable groups, including persons with cancer, persons infected with HIV, the elderly, and infants.

Contaminants may include:

- Infectious agents from wildlife or humans such as ***Giardia and Cryptosporidium*.**
- Inorganic substances such as **arsenic, chromium,** and **nitrates** which may occur naturally or result from industrial, agricultural, or residential practices.
- Organic chemicals such as **tetrachloro-ethylene (TCE)** from industry, **benzene** from gas stations, and **pesticides** from farming or home use.
- Radioactive elements such as **radon** which may occur naturally.

An important way of determining contamination by infectious agents is the coliform test that is regularly conducted for public water systems and highly recommended for individual wells.

- For public water systems[1], thousands of coliform tests were performed in 1998 and less than 1% showed coliform contamination.
- During 1996 and 1997, 2,300 individual wells were voluntarily tested[2] for coliforms, of which 30% were found unsatisfactory.
- During disasters, such as flooding, the Health District may issue special instructions to keep drinking water safe (e.g., boil water alerts).

[1]Group A public water systems
[2]Tested at Southwest Washington Health District

Abandoned Wells

Old, unused, or obsolete wells are a potential threat to human health and safety and must be decommissioned properly.

- An improperly closed private well can potentially contaminate the area's groundwater by allowing the introduction of unwanted materials directly into the water source. It is unknown how many abandoned wells there are in Clark County.
- Hand dug wells pose a safety hazard because of their large diameter (usually 3 feet).